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ABSTRACT

Noting that too many children leave elementary school without developing the ability to use words imaginatively, this paper presents a teaching approach that uses literature to foster invention in children's writing. The approach described is part of a total composition program that structures writing experiences in which children observe settings, people, and occurrences and then write about them. The paper first presents a rationale for reading literature aloud to children, then offers six writing techniques that children can explore subsequent to listening to literature read aloud: (1) story retelling, (2) writing alphabet books with a story line, (3) writing a story for a wordless picture book, (4) writing endings for unfinished stories read aloud, (5) writing stories with a plot structure parallel to a story read aloud, and (6) rewriting stories with a different point of view. The paper includes samples of children's use of these techniques. (HTH)

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: AN IMPETUS TO COMPOSITION

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Clever ideas for motivating children's writing are abundant. Many books on composition are available. Articles in professional magazines report imaginative ideas that have worked. For a teacher interested in having children write imaginatively, the only problem is selecting which ideas to use.

Despite the plethora of suggestions for encouraging writing, children's composition is not as impressive as it might be. Too many students leave elementary school without developing the ability to use words imaginatively, to evoke a setting effectively, to create a believable character or fashion a convincing plot. There are two reasons for this.

One, far too seldom are ways to stimulate composition developed into a coherent, organized and sequential program in which one component leads logically to what follows. A bag full of clever motivating tricks will not develop writing skills unless these are put into a conceptual scheme that moves children progressively from one skill to another.

Two, we too seldom consider the act of composition itself. The craft of writing, including specific skills which can be acquired and practiced, is infrequently analyzed. From such analyses we can derive teaching principles to help improve children's writing.

The approach described here is only part of a total composition program which builds on initial observation experiences wherein children solve different kinds of writing problems. Most writers are especially sensitive observers. The program structures writing experiences in which children observe settings, people and occurrences and write about them. Such sensory writing lays needed groundwork for the craft of composition but will not be discussed further here.

It is important to read regularly to children. Much literature:

- 1) appeals to many children psychologically before they are able to cope with the reading problems presented. Children enjoy Able's Island long before most of them can cope with the intricacies of William Steig's prose by themselves.

He ambled back to his starting point near the cheery birch, his toes turned awkwardly in. The mess of wet clothes he wore added to his sense of ineptitude and shame; he was used to their being dry and pressed. Where had he erred, he wondered. He should have bound the rudder to the nail, of course. He had been too hasty in his preparations, and he had underestimated the force of the rapids.

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- 2) poetry, especially, must be heard for the full effect to be apparent. Few children can read the poems in Mercer Mayer's A Poison Tree by themselves and enjoy their full impact.

The Boy Fishing

I am cold and alone,
On my tree-root sitting as still as stone.
The fish come to my net. I scorned the sun,
The voices on the road, and they have gone.
My eyes are buried in the cold pond, under
The cold, spread leaves; my thoughts are silver-wet.
I have ten stickleback, a half-day's plunder,
Safe in my jar. I shall have ten more yet.

E. J. Scoville

- 3) is so far from the beaten path that unless teachers help introduce it to children, it may be missed. Most children will encounter Beverly Cleary's writing by themselves; far fewer will encounter books by Philippa Pearce.

"Guess" from Shadow Cage

That last day of October a freak storm hit the suburb of Woodley Park. Slates rattled off roofs, garbage cans chased garbage-can lids along the streets, billboards were slammed down, and at midnight there was a huge sound like a giant breaking his kindling wood, and then an almighty crash, and then briefly the sound of the same giant crunching his toast.

Then only the wind, which died surprisingly soon.

In the morning everyone could see that the last forest tree of Grove Road--of the whole suburb--had fallen, crashing down onto Grove Road Primary School. No lives had been lost, since the caretaker did not live on the premises; but the school hamster had later to be treated for shock.

LITERATURE AS LANGUAGE INPUT

A compelling reason for sharing literature regularly with the young is for the language input it provides. One author commented that:

. . . language environment of the home, peers, mass electronic media is generally too similar to the children's own language to provide the necessary stimulation and modeling needed for continued language development . . .

Because of this, we need to provide exposure to language much richer than the children's own ability to use language--language that is found readily in the best of printed materials for children.

To ensure students receive the fullest possible language stimulus, we must look carefully at what we read. In addition to a fine plot, the material should be language rich.

Exemplary language use is found in the best children's books. One example comes from the author/illustrator of an impressive array of animal characters. Language distinguishes many of his books: it is complex, not needlessly so, but rather to serve the purpose of telling a story effectively. In this one, The Amazing Bone is the main character. Making a bone (usually a rather inert object) into a main character might seem to be a problem. Not at all. The bone has a distinct personality, largely because of the language William Steig uses. When asked by Pearl, a pig, why she sneezes, the bone tartly replies: "I don't know . . . I didn't make the world." That helps establish the bone's character more effectively than descriptive sentences about it would have.

When the fox snatches Pearl, the bone's courage shows. He seized Pearl in a tight embrace.

"The bone commenced to revile the fox. 'You coward!' it sneered. 'You worm, you odiferous wretch!'"

The fox embodies a long tradition of reprehensible villains:

"These expletives were annoying. 'Shut up, or I'll eat you,' the fox snarled. 'It would be amusing to gnaw on a bone that talks . . . and screams in pain.'"

Another aspect of the fox's character is revealed earlier:

"'As I live and flourish!' he exclaimed. 'A talking bone. I've always wanted to own something of this sort.'"

Such books provide language input for children. Because of vocabulary used, and the syntax they include, picture books provide models which can influence children's language. Authors of picture books use the words necessary to deal with the topic. With the exception of those books designed with a carefully constrained vocabulary which can be read by children themselves, authors do not limit their word choices, knowing that children's listening comprehension is more extensive than their speaking/reading vocabularies. Further, words are often determined by context, and it is possible to find out what a word may mean by listening to the sentence in which it occurs. The following examples are taken from a book written and illustrated by a Canadian, William Kurelek. In his A Prairie Boy's Winter, he uses the following sentences:

"Hoarfrost coated their eyebrows as they set out on the slow, wobbly ride homeward.

"John would undo the stanchions in late afternoon and chase the whole herd into the bitter cold outside."

Readers needn't have braved the wild winters of Canada, or indeed of Wisconsin, in order to determine word meanings because of context. The use of hoarfrost, a word which may need to be explained to children, is richer than simply using the more common word frost. The nature of the ride is clarified by Kurelek's use of wobbly, which underlines the uncertainty of the horses' gait. In the second example, children can deduce that stanchions are some sort of apparatus to restrain horses, even if the exact nature of the device is not clear. Thus by not limiting his language, but choosing words he felt were appropriate, Kurelek provides language input richer than the children themselves use.

COMPOSITION PROBLEMS

Many writing problems children are asked to solve can be directly based on literature. That is, the book is not used simply for the subliminal enlarging of children's understanding, but rather as a direct base for writing. A composition is chosen, and a writing task is constructed which grows from it. The teacher reads the story or poem and children compose as a consequence. We will consider here six techniques:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1) story retelling | 4) plot completion |
| 2) alphabet books | 5) derived plot patterns, and |
| 3) wordless books | 6) point of view |

STORY RETELLING

A simple way to begin establishing a relation between book literature and children's composition is to ask them to retell a story in their own words. At first this may seem simplistic but in fact translating from the aural mode--listening to a story--into their own language is a valuable activity for children.

One kindergarten teacher used a version of The Three Bears. After reading it to her children, she asked students to retell it in their own words. The following illustrates Tracy's use of language to recreate the story. The sequence is firmly restated, and in several places the dictated story includes a rhythm reminiscent of the original.

The mother bear made some porridge but the porridge was too hot. So, the bears went for a walk in the woods. A little girl came from a little house, to the house of the three bears. First she went to the papa bear's porridge, but it was too hot. Then she went to the middle-sized bowl of porridge. Then she went to try the wee little baby's porridge and it was just right. Then she went

upstairs. They had three chairs. Papa's size, mother's size, and a baby size. First, Goldilocks went to the papa bear's chair. It was too hard.

Then she went to the mama bear's chair. Then she went to the baby bear's chair. She broke the chair all up! Then Goldilocks went to the next room. She went in the papa bear's bed, and it was too hard. Then she went in the mama bear's bed, but it was too soft. Then she went to baby bear's bed. This bed was just right. Goldilocks fell asleep. Then the three bears came. Papa bear said, "Somebody's been drinking my porridge." Then they came to mother bear's porridge. Mother said, "Somebody's been drinking my porridge." Then baby bear said, "Somebody's been drinking my porridge and they drank it all up!" Then baby bear said, "Somebody's been sitting in my chair and they ate it all into pieces!" Then they went to the next room. Papa bear said, "Somebody's been sleeping in my bed." Baby bear said, "Somebody's been sleeping in my bed and here she is now!" Goldilocks blinked her eyes and saw three bears. She ran out the window. She ran and ran and she would never go to the forest again.

Notice in the preceding that Tracy intensifies little, by preceding it with the word wee, not a syntactic construction used in the original. The inclusion of direct conversation is also noteworthy for this age. Unclear about exactly what porridge is, Tracy has each of the bears drink their porridge. Another time, having children actually taste some kind of cereal approximating porridge might help clarify their understanding.

ALPHABET BOOKS

A technique worth exploring with older children is using the alphabet book as a model for composition. While many of the lavishly illustrated picture books are simply collections of objects, some few contain a sequential story line. This type can be used with intermediate grade students as a basis for composition.

In introducing the writing problem to fifth graders, one teacher first acknowledged she was aware such books were far beneath them. After they agreed, she explained that the kindergarten children wanted some new alphabet stories and asked if they would help. With this cover for their self-concept, they listened intently as the teacher read Wanda Gag's ABC Bunny; Apricot ABC by Miska Miles is also appropriate. During the discussion which followed, children commented that each letter had to be used. It had not escaped their attention that to do this while telling a story which made sense was no mean feat. Several days later Andy turned in the following description called:

THE MEDIEVAL ALPHABET

- A is for Abbot who runs the monastery.
- B is for Bells that ring in the monastery.

C is for Cell where the monks sleep
 D is for Dungeon where bad people weep.
 E is for Everyone who comes to pray there.
 F is for Fairies that fly around.
 G is for God who sends them down.
 H is for the Heavens where they all come from.
 I is for Ivory that the clouds are made from.
 J is for Journey that the nobleman takes.
 K is for King who sits upon his throne.
 L is for Lilacs that grow outside the monastery.
 M is for Monk who waters them like so.
 N is for Noblemen who guard the castle well.
 O is for Oath that the monk has to take.
 P is for Pictures that hang in the monastery.
 Q is for Quiver you get there at night.
 R is for Rings that the king puts on his right hand.
 S is for Slurping Serf who exchanges his work for safety.
 T is for Toil that they do so hastily.
 U is for Unbelievable work they do.
 V is for Vatican where the religious meetings are held.
 W is for Wax that falls from the candle light.
 X is for Xylophone that plays all day and night.
 Z is for Zero, but now I must go. If you like this story,
 let me know.

Ye End.

WORDLESS BOOKS

Another composition experience presents a translation problem. We use wordless picture books effectively in asking children to take a story the artist has encoded in pictures and re-encode it in their own words. The ability to recast a message in another form is a major distinguishing characteristic of fluent communicators. A significant difference between those who use language easily and less competent language users is that the former are usually able to say something in several ways.

If variety in encoding is a mark of communication competency, we should provide opportunities to take a message in one mode and recommunicate it in another. Translating a written story into a dramatization is one example. Changing a wordless picture book into a dictated or written story is another.

One kindergarten teacher regularly includes time for children to dictate stories to her, after they have viewed a wordless book. Early this year she shared Bobo's Dream with her children. This is a gentle, realistic story of a small black boy who, accompanied by his dog, goes on a pleasant journey to the park where they enjoy a book and a bone, and then cope with problems. Soft edged illustrations in grey, brown and orange are realistic.

After sharing the book with her group, the teacher left it on the table so children could look at it again whenever they chose. In the following days, some children came to dictate a story to her. Bradley told the following:

"John said that Bobo should come because they were going somewhere. They went to the store and got some bread. They paid the man and went away with the bread. The boy gave the bone to Bobo and Bobo sucked the bone and then a big dog came along nicely. But then he took the bone with a growling face. Bobo was very mad while John was reading the book. He put a paw on John's arm. Then John looked, too. The other dog had the bone and John said, 'Give me the bone,' to the other dog. Bobo was barking with a growling face. Then they got the bone and walked away while Bobo was sucking on his bone. He licked John and thanked him for getting the bone while Bobo was sucking on the bone. Bobo went to sleep while he was sucking on his bone and dreamed that the football players were playing football. One of them had the football in his hand and was running. Then one of them almost caught the ball and then they almost won the game. One of them threw it at some boys and hit one of them. Then he dreamed that they were very mad and took the football away. Bobo dreamed that the bigger kids wouldn't give the football back. He tried to take it while he was trying to catch one of the other football players. Bobo dreamed that he opened one of his eyes and John was shouting with a football in his hand saying, 'Come here!' He woke up and thought he was big while he was dreaming. He was so big and the other kids looked at him and were very scared because he was so big. He threw the football back at them and ran away as fast as they could. Then they hopped on his back and hugged him and then he held up the football and they went away. Then the other dog came along and Bobo put his paw on his bone while John was almost finished with his book. Then the other dog looked at him and he barked because he thought he was bigger than him. Then they went away while the other dog was licking his fur.

There are some gaps in this narrative retelling which are unclear unless one reads the account while looking at the pictures. Nonetheless, this is impressive oral language for a five year old. It indicates the completeness with which children will retell stories if given an opportunity to dictate a response.

The sample provides interesting insights into a five year old's language capabilities. Note the relational terms:

"reading the book while . . ."

"and then a big . . ."

There is also effective use of descriptive terms:

"... then a big dog came along nicely."

"... took the bone with a growling face."

The child indicates an ability to deal with a variety of ideas in one syntactic unit. Notice the sentence:

"He licked John and thanked him for getting the bone for him while the bone was on the ground."

This is complex language, showing the influence of adult language models. It also indicates a rationale for providing time to dictate stories to the teacher. It will be several years before the child will be able to write a sentence this complex.

Another interesting possibility exists in John Burningham's new book, Time to Get Out of the Bath, Shirley. This is a tongue-in-cheek treatment of a typical child's fantasizing. Shirley is ostensibly in her bathtub, and in pictures with only minimal language on the left page, her mother goes on with routine chores and pragmatic conversation to Shirley. To the viewer's delight, however, the right hand page shows, without words, Shirley's imagined journey to a land peopled with knights, tournaments, kings that blow up animal balloons, among other oddities. Share the book with children and then ask them to dictate an account of Shirley's adventures.

PLOT COMPLETION

Plot completion experiences are effective composition problems at different age/grade levels. Read a story to a critical point, and have children finish it. The task demands that children take clues about characters and setting from what has been read. Using these to write a convincing conclusion is a useful composition challenge. Simple stories work well with young children. As I described in Read to Write, it is possible to use Swimmy by Leo Lionni for this purpose. Read it to the point where the small fish desperately declares to Swimmy that something must be done to save them from the tuna. Then let children write or dictate an ending. Lionni's new book entitled A Color of His Own works equally well. The timid chameleon is trying to achieve an identity stronger than his constantly changing skin color indicates. One after another his attempted solutions fail, until at last he meets another chameleon. What will they do? Stopping here assures high motivation as children complete the story.

With older students, one of Lionni's more enigmatic books, Theodore and the Talking Mushroom, is appropriate. This provides an opportunity for plot development, though it is not a plot completion experience, per se. Theodore, a frightened, tiny mouse, seeks his friends' approbation in a devious way. When friends lizard, frog and turtle discover his deception, they chase him away with shouts of "Charlatan!" "Scoundrel!" and "Imposter!" The book ends on a decidedly melancholy note:

He ran and ran. And his friends never saw him again.

The story is technically completed, at least as Lionni conceived it. Yet I found, in group discussion, that children do not consider it ended, so I asked them to write a completion for it. Fifth graders wrote the following:

Theodore ran on and on 'til he reached a beautiful little stream where he met a little blue mouse called Flippy.

Flippy had just run away from a mouse orphanage. Theodore and Flippy became good friends.

Flippy and Theodore made a house in a big tree, where they worked together. They usually ate acorns and fruit. Whatever they had, they shared.

Theodore forgot about his old friends until a lizard, turtle, and a frog came. They were different animals, but Theodore ran in fright, never knowing who they were.

Flippy followed, not knowing what to think. Finally, Theodore stopped, telling Flippy who was bewildered and amazed, what was wrong. She convinced him they should run straight home. Then everything was peaceful again.

Roger wrote the following:

Theodore ran and ran until he collapsed. When he looked around, he found himself near a stream. He also found that it was almost dark. Theodore didn't know what to do. Should he look for someone, or just stay there until morning? He was thinking about it when suddenly a cricket chirped. He ran to an old tree stump. Shivering, he looked around. In the dark he thought he saw a shape in the corner. Then he whispered, "Are you there?"

"Yes," said a low-pitched voice.

"Who are you?" Theodore asking, gaining confidence. "I'm Tom, the toad," said the voice, "and I live here." "I'm very sorry about this," Theodore said, "But I'm new here.

"By the way, what's your name?" asked Tom.

"Oh, I'm Theodore. I just got here, and I'm looking for a new home."

"You could live with me," said Tom.

"That's very nice of you. I think I will," Tom concluded.

The two new friends sat there talking for awhile. Later on, they both went to sleep. When they woke up, Theodore said, "Ever since I met you, I've gained new confidence in myself. I like you."

DERIVED PLOT PATTERNS

Many opportunities exist when we study the plot of a story and extract the story structure, to serve as a framework within which children can compose. This is sometimes called parallel plot construction. Read a story to your group, and then help them think about the sequence of action in the story. The idea is to lift the level of abstraction, from the specific details in this particular story to a more general organizational structure which children use in making a story of their own.

The story structure in "The Gingerbread Boy" is an example. The particular detail is that an old lady makes a gingerbread boy. Lifted to the next level of abstraction, the structural element is that a person makes a food. Continue with this process until specific details of a story are gone, and what remains is a plot skeleton on which children can arrange the flesh of their own imaginative ideas.

In The Cobbler's Reward, we find a useful plot structure. Stripped of its particular details, the structure is as follows:

1. A poor person sets out to seek a fortune.
2. The person stops to befriend a group of creatures, who seem insignificant, but who offer to help the person if they ever need help.
3. and 4. Are a repeat of #2.
5. The person arrives at a place where there is something the person wants very much.
6. To get this, the person must perform three tasks, all of which are seemingly impossible.
7. The person does perform the task, with the help of the first group of creatures.
8. and 9. are a repeat of #7.
10. Having accomplished the task, the person lives happily ever after.

After reading The Cobbler's Reward last month to her group of fourth graders, one teacher asked her students to use this structure, extracted from the story, as a basis for a story of their own.

Chris wrote the following story, based on the plot pattern in the book.

Once upon a time, a candlestick maker named Jacob lived deep in the jungle. He was very poor and hadn't eaten in days. So he set out to seek a fortune. If he were to travel to the nearest village, he would go through the treacherous jungle.

On his way he met up with a group of anteaters. They were being threatened by vicious army ants. Jacob saw this; he pulled a piece of sugar cane out of the ground and threw it to the ants. The ants went away from the anteaters. The oldest one of them all stepped forward and said, "Thank you kindly, brave one. If there is ever anything we can do for you, just call out our name." Jacob thought, "What could they ever do for me? Oh well!" He went on.

A while later he was looking up in the trees. He saw a panther ready to jump at a toucan. Jacob quickly climbed the tree and grabbed the toucan, then took it to a safer spot. The toucan thanked him gratefully and said, "If you are ever in need of help just 'coo.'" He thought to himself, "How can he help me?" He went on his way.

When he was almost to the end of the jungle, he had to climb over a mountain. On his way he saw a gorilla stuck on a rock slide. Jacob was very strong. He pulled and tugged at the rocks. Within no time at all he got the rocks off the gorilla. He thanked him deeply. Then said, "If you are ever in need of help, beat on your chest." Jacob thought, "How can he help me?" Then he went on over the mountain.

On the other side of the mountain he came to a village. Many people were gathered around a hut. This happened to be the evil witch doctor's hut. One of the men told him that the doctor had taken the chief's son. Anyone who can perform the three tasks will set his son free. "What's in it for me?" asked Jacob. The man replied, "You will get a million rubies or become chief. You may choose." "I am very strong and very fast. I will try to release him." But the man said, "If you fail the tasks you will be thrown in quicksand." "I will try anyway," Jacob said.

So Jacob went to the hut door, and shook the chime by the door. The door flew open. Jacob stepped in. No one was there. The door flew shut; a man appeared. He said, "Did you come to set the boy loose?" "I did. I'm Jacob from the deep jungle." The man replied, "You must perform three tasks, if you are to succeed." "I am ready for the first task."

"For the first task, I have taken panther oil and oiled down a tower on all sides. By dawn you must have the coconut from inside, or else!" Jacob knew panther oil was very slippery. He thought, "How could he?" Then he remembered about the toucan; so he started to coo. After awhile of cooing, the toucan came. He asked Jacob what he wanted. Jacob said, "Up in the tower is a coconut; bring it to me." "Well done, sir!" The toucan flew up to the tower, brought the coconut and left. When dawn came, the witch doctor came. Sure enough, Jacob had the coconut on his lap.

"For your second task, I will put you in a pit infested with ants. By one turn of the hourglass you must still be alive."

"I am ready," said Jacob. He was dropped into the hole. The ants were fire ants. He knew that they could bite like a cheetah. Then he thought about the anteaters. He called out, "Anteaters, O' anteaters!" The anteaters came running. One stepped forth, then said, "What help do you need?" Jacob replied, "If I don't hold back the ants, I will be eaten." "We can help." As soon as the ants came, the anteaters ate all the ants. Then they marched back to the jungle.

After the time was up, the witch doctor came back. But he didn't let Jacob out. He told Jacob the hole was 50 trees deep. "By dawn, you must be sleeping by the tree." Jacob was thinking and still thinking when he remembered about the gorilla. As quick as he could he beat on his chest as hard as he could. The gorilla was sleeping, but heard it anyway, and came quickly. He brought with him some monkeys, just in case. He saw Jacob down in the hole. He knew why Jacob called. The monkeys grabbed each other's tails and the gorilla took the monkey's tail. He put the monkeys down into the hole. Jacob took hold of the first monkey's hand and was pulled up. In the morning the witch doctor came to the tree. Sure enough, there was Jacob. He had done all the tasks and the chief's son was free. Now Jacob was a rich candlestick maker, who lived happily ever after.

Another slightly more difficult composition problem is writing a fable for a particular moral. Use Paul Galdone's Three Fox Fables. I usually read one a day, and put the moral on the chalkboard and leave it there. On the fourth day, we discuss the three morals, and I help children put into words their understanding of the characteristics of fables. Then I ask them to choose one of the three fables and compose a short story featuring animal characters. The characters are to personify human vices and virtues and should be direct and concise. The story must lead logically into the concluding moral.

Early this spring a teacher of eighth graders agreed to try this idea with his students, who are functioning academically on a sixth grade level. The teacher told his students they were going to write fables for the first graders in the building. The older boys and girls were delighted with the task.

One of the morals in the book is, "Tricksters cannot complain when they themselves are tricked." In response to this moral, Barbara wrote the following:

One day a raccoon was sitting in a creek, trying to catch a fish for his dinner. In a few minutes a fish swam near the raccoon, and when he noticed the raccoon sitting there, he started to swim away.

The raccoon said, "Don't worry, I won't eat you. I want to be your friend." The raccoon was very nice to the fish.

Every time the raccoon would eat something, he would give his friend, the fish, twice as much as he kept to eat. The raccoon kept feeding the fish until he was big and fat.

The raccoon thought, "Now he's big enough to eat." When the raccoon was just about to eat the fish, a fox came up to them. He said that he was the fish's friend, and that he would eat the raccoon if the raccoon tried to eat the fish. The raccoon was scared, and started walking away. He thought to himself, "I didn't want that fish, anyway."

Holder's new illustrations for these fables are especially striking.

POINT OF VIEW

Another challenging writing problem deals with point of view. The egocentric nature of young children has been described by such psychologists as Piaget. To help them grow from this egocentricity to an awareness of the ideas, problems, feelings and reactions of others, we ask them to assume the role of another.

A convenient way to do this is to have them recast a story told in third person into first person narrative. Folk tales work especially well for this purpose because their brevity makes it possible for children to hold the plot in their minds as they write.

Much folk literature is told in third person--the impersonal, omniscient narrator recounts what happens. After sharing several tales, in discussion with a group, we identify the narrator's qualities. These include being able to see (and report on) things happening to all characters, even if they occur at widely separated locations at the same time. This contrasts with the more limited ability of each of the characters to know only what happens to them or what is reported to them.

The writing task we set for children is to retell the story, switching from third to first person. In becoming a character and retelling the story from that point of view, children deal with some crucial problems:

One, personalizing the account to include a character's reaction--the feelings engendered by a plot event, is a valuable challenge. In Snow White (Burkert, 1972), for instance, the usual third person account specifies only that she awoke from the sleep induced by the poisoned apple. Children, when assuming the person of Snow White, can describe how she would have felt upon awakening. Two, children are compelled to account for events which happened when the character whose identity they are assuming was not present. Again, to use the Snow White example, there is no direct way she can have known about the making of the poisoned apple. To rewrite the story from her point of view, the child must in some way explain what Snow White knows about the apple and how she knows it.

A teacher of fifth grade students used Snow White as a motivation for first-person narration. In the following, Steve narrates as if he were the evil queen.

I, the wicked witch, always wanted to be queen. When the queen died and I became queen, I was extremely excited! I had a mirror that always told the truth. I asked it who was the most beautiful in the world. The mirror said I was and I knew it was speaking the truth. I cared about my beauty more than anything else.

One day I asked my mirror who was the most beautiful of them all, and to my astonishment, it said that I was the most beautiful here, but Snow White was 1,000 times more beautiful than I was. I was furious! I envied her! I wanted her dead!

I called one of my hunters. I told him to take Snow White into the woods and kill her and bring me back her lungs and liver. That night I had them fried and I ate them.

Soon after, I stood in front of my mirror and asked who was the most beautiful of all. I was astounded! The mirror still said Snow White was more beautiful. I knew the hunter had deceived me. I vowed to kill Snow White.

I thought of an ingenious plan. I dressed up like an old woman. I went over the mountain to where Snow White was. I knocked on the door and said, "I am an old woman and I am selling laces. Let me come in and I'll lace you up properly."

Snow White let me in. I tied the laces very tight. Snow White fell on the ground dead. I had gotten my revenge.

In a few days I asked the same question, "Who is the most beautiful?" I was terribly angry at the mirror's answer. I again dressed up like an old woman. I made a poisonous comb. One brush of it and you would fall dead.

Once more I went over the hills to where Snow White was. She let me in. The instant the comb touched her hair, Snow White fell dead. I went back to the castle. Again I asked the mirror who was the most beautiful, and it said, "Snow White." I was enraged with anger! I couldn't bear it. I made a poisonous apple. Half of it was poisonous, half was not. I went over the hill as an old woman. Snow White said she couldn't open the door for anyone. I showed her the apple. She immediately became hungry. I took a bite from the unpoisoned half and Snow White took a bite from the poisonous half. She fell dead instantly.

When I returned to my castle and asked my mirror who was the most beautiful, it finally said that I was the most beautiful. I was thrilled . . . just so excited!

Time passed and I received an invitation to a wedding. I was curious to see who the girl was. When I got there, I recognized Snow White. As I walked in, metal shoes were set on a coal fire. They were set in front of me and I was made to dance until I died. Oh! I was so angry!

In this next sample, Becky retells the tale as if she were one of the dwarfs.

Let me tell you about Snow White and our big adventure. It all started when we seven dwarfs lived in the big woods, just as disorganized as seven little men could be.

One day a beautiful girl came to our house while we were at work. We found her asleep in one of the dwarf's beds. When she woke up, she told us that she was fleeing from the queen, her stepmother, who was terribly jealous of her because she was so beautiful. She also told us that her name was Snow White.

After looking around our disorganized cottage we decided that if she would keep the cottage neat and clean and cook for us, we would let her stay.

The next morning we went to work. When we got home we found Snow White lying strangled on the floor. We saw that there was a lace tied tightly around her waist. We quickly cut the string. When she came to, she said that a little old lady came and was selling laces. Snow White said that the lady tied it and kept pulling tighter until she fell down. We told her that it must have been the queen, and that she wasn't to let anybody in.

The next day we went off to work again. When we got home, we found Snow White on the floor again. We saw a comb, and it wasn't anybody's. We found out that it was poisonous. After we washed Snow White's hair, she came to and told us that she bought this comb and combed her hair, and then she fell down. Again we told her not to let anyone in. We all ate and then went to bed.

The next day when we came home from work we found Snow White on the ground. She looked dead. We tried everything, but she was dead.

We buried her in a glass coffin. It was on top of a hill. A prince rode by and saw Snow White in her coffin. While we were moving Snow White's coffin we must have jerked her. Some of the apple came up and out of her mouth. She was alive again!

The prince and Snow White got married. We were invited. Snow White's evil stepmother came to the wedding. Some men brought some red-hot shoes, and the evil stepmother had to dance until she died.

Ever since Snow White left us we have been seven sloppy, disorganized, little dwarfs living in one messy cottage.

Most folk tales work equally well, though the technique also works with modern fiction. Another folk tale which works especially well is Cooper's The Silver Cow, a Welsh tale. The unusual new illustrations by Diamond for Rumpelstiltskin are especially helpful in motivating children to rewrite this tale.

We have briefly considered six writing techniques to help improve children's composition skills. Suggestions were made about ways to use:

- 1) story retelling, 2) alphabet books, 3) wordless books, 4) plot completion, 5) derived plot patterns, and 6) point of view.

It is important, however, to keep in mind that these strategies, however attractive, must be seen within the context of a total composition program if children are to achieve their full potential as writers. The craft of writing is mastered slowly, but it can be mastered with pleasure if we think about what we will have children do, and why.

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